

## No Recall for Yo-Yo Ball Toy; Injuries Reported, but U.S. Agency Downplays Danger

by Douglas Holt

Chicago Tribune

Yo-yo water balls, the stretchy, rubbery toys that are sold near checkout lines for as little as \$1, pose a potential strangulation hazard to children but will not be recalled, according to a federal consumer agency.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has received 186 reports of incidents in which the toy's sticky cord wrapped around a child's neck, sometimes after it was whipped overhead like a lasso.

"In all cases, a parent or child successfully removed the cord from the child's neck," according to a commission news release the Tribune obtained late Tuesday.

Based on the "low likelihood of strangulation," the release said, "the yo-yo water ball toy does not meet congressionally mandated standards for product recall."

Agency officials declined to discuss the findings, which were to be made public Wednesday.

**U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.)**, who wrote a letter this month to the commission calling for the recall of yo-yo balls, said Tuesday that the agency should have moved to get the product away from children.

"We're not talking about an essential product here. We're talking about a toy," she said. "If there is a potential risk of strangulation, accompanied by 186 known incidents, then I think it ought to go further."

Parents who said their children had close calls with the toys said the agency should have taken

steps to ban them.

"I think it stinks," said Lisa Lipin of Skokie. In July her son Andrew, 5, was swinging a yo-yo ball in the living room when the cord wrapped tightly around his neck, she said.

The boy ran to the kitchen "and in a very faint voice said, 'Cut! Cut!'" Lipin said.

In June, Kathy Henn of Schiller Park said she was horrified to find the same thing had happened to her daughter, Chynnah, 6. Henn used scissors to cut the rubber cord.

"It was on really tight," she said. "Her face was red. I couldn't budge that thing for nothing. It should be banned."

In Rochester, N.Y., the 5-year-old daughter of pediatrician Marc Lande was spinning in a circle as she held the toy. When she stopped, it wrapped around her neck, he said.

"She came right up to me, and I couldn't get it off," Lande said. "I couldn't unwrap it, and she was in trouble."

He said he picked up his daughter, ran inside and got a pair of scissors.

He called the decision against recalling the toy "clearly wrong. This is a toy that is hurting children."

The commission's statement acknowledged that the incidents are scary but added that no children have died or received lasting injuries. In seven cases, there were broken blood vessels in eyes, cheeks, neck, scalp or elsewhere on the children's heads.

The agency's "staff realizes that the reported incidents are uncomfortable and anxiety-provoking events for children and adults," the news release said. "However, based on information currently available, the staff has concluded that the toy poses a low risk of strangulation."

The decision sets U.S. safety officials apart from counterparts in the United Kingdom and Australia, which have banned yo-yo water balls.

Massachusetts and New York officials issued warnings about the balls in June. New York officials said a Staten Island girl got a bruised retina when she was hit by a water ball. A 5-year-old boy near South Bend, Ind., was seriously injured when the cord snapped back into his eye.